2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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ties of the larger society which the company had joined. Meanwhile another group was meeting informally before it was admitted into one or other of the Societies. Since the Stars and Wolf-men were approximately even in number, there probably was a regular alternation. According to reasonable estimate, the Potbellies joined the Stars about 1840; the next group of young men would then have joined the Wolves, say in 1843 or 1844; the following company joining the Stars in about 1849–50.

If the Sacred Dances, except the Sacrifice Dance, were gone through in order, there would thus be several companies each year whose members were eligible to vow any one of the Dances, and our informants were all under the impression that one or more of the Dances was given each summer. It seems quite clear that the Law Enforcer Dance was vowed only by the older levels of the active warriors. After having gone through this rite, these men more or less retired as "old men," and, having "sat on the sage," acquired certain privileges and freedom denied to their fellow tribesmen who had not yet gone through this Dance. These "old men" acted as ceremonial grandfathers, i.e. sponsors and teachers, for others going through the various lodges, but were no longer active as Stars or Wolf-men. They became members of an undifferentiated group of elders, the ranks of their original company having no doubt been drastically thinned out by the time they would have arrived at this status.

If the above interpretation be correct, there would be three age divisions: the "young men," those meeting in companies; the "middle-aged, mature men," whose companies had joined either the Stars or the Wolf-men, and, having gone through the Fly Dance, were eligible to vow the other Dances; the "old men" who had gone through the Law Enforcer's Dance and were no longer active in the Star and Wolf-men societies, except two of their number, one of whom served as announcer in each.

The young men, who together formed the company, being of approximately the same age, were tied together by bonds of friendship and there were apparently not a few pairs of "inseparable friends" in each company. One of our informants, Cora Chandler, indicated that the bonds holding together the members of a company were so intimate that marriage between their children was

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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CHAPTER X

OLD AGE AND DEATH

It is the opinion of the now aged Gros Ventres that the proportion of old persons was much greater in the past than it has been since they have taken up the white man's ways; and further, that the aged then retained their health and vigor to a greater degree.[1] One old woman stated that when she was young, there used to be many old people, but that they died off when there were no more buffalo. She added: "People lived to a good old age on the things that the Supreme Being provided,—roots, wild vegetables and fruits, dried meats and berries. In those days, too, they drank broth instead of tea and coffee. Old folks didn't lose their teeth then, although even young girls do nowadays. Their teeth eventually got worn down, but they seldom pulled them. In fact, if an old person should lose a tooth, he thought it was awful and was sure that he was ready for the grave. Furthermore, people didn't get white hair until they were ready for 'old age sleep'—very old people sleep most of the time—yet now one sees middle-aged and even younger people with gray hair like the whites have."

Status and Treatment of the Aged

It was believed that a person who had lived to a ripe old age had been privileged to do so by the Supreme Being. Therefore, they reasoned, if you are good to old people, these in turn will pray to the Supreme Being for your health, long life, and success. Children were instructed explicitly to be good to the aged,—to feed them, to clothe them, and to help them in difficulties,—as well as to seek out those so blessed and ask for their prayers. It was

[1] Allowance should of course be made for the fact that "old age" is a relative term. When it was said that young men were urged to marry "older experienced women," this referred to a woman of perhaps twenty to twenty-five. See pp. 171–72. A woman on the northern plains was "old" at forty, according to Denig, p. 513.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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get killed but she was told to go ahead anyway and have the Dance,—which she did. Other women would join the Dance with the chief vower, but under what general conditions and procedures we did not ascertain except that to qualify either as associates or as chief vower, women had to be "old" or "very old," to be "women who had seen all of life" and were "beyond their prime," not "young women." This would probably mean in Gros Ventre age terminology women beyond the age of about forty-five or fifty. On one occasion, while a Women's Dance was in progress a very old woman, whose brother had just been very badly wounded by some Sioux and who was hovering between life and death, came to the dance lodge where the dancers were gathered and said, "Well, I came in here of my own accord without anyone asking me to join. I promised to join so that my brother may get well." She was told to choose her side, "talls" or "shorts," her face was painted the ritual way, and so she joined. The wounded brother, it may be added, did not recover. The Women's Dance was not put up, as were the men's Sacred Dances, by age-groups proper since women had no such age group organizations corresponding to the men's Star and Wolf societies and companies.

The women dancers had no crier and no police force, but were divided, as in the men's dances, into tall slender ones and short ones. Two young women were chosen to serve during the rite as ātsa'an, attendants or waiters. "Those who were not ashamed to do things," Coming Daylight explained, "and who were quick, were chosen [as waiters]. These were not bashful or backward. They had to do whatever they were told and to wait on people. They had a lot of work to do. When there was going to be a Women's Dance, they would have to call on the members on each side of the camp circle, starting at the center opening. They would go to each lodge where there was a member." They also had to dance hard, but did not wear any caps. Their places in the dance lodge were at the door, one on the side where the "talls" sat, the other on the side of the "shorts." On both occasions when Coming Daylight served as a "calf" the two young women attendants were Woman Chief for the "talls" and Perfume (or Sweet Perfume) for the "shorts."